

MEMORANDUM

To: Governor JB Pritzker
Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz
Illinois Department of Public Health
Cc: State Superintendent Carmen Ayala
Illinois State Board of Education Board of Education Members

From: State of Illinois Local School District Superintendents

Date: June 24, 2021

Re: 2021-2022 School Year Planning

Greetings, and thank you for your leadership in protecting all Illinois citizens over the past 14 months during this terrible pandemic. As school leaders, we share your concerns and take our role seriously in protecting our students, staff, and their families at the local level. To your credit, our State has successfully transitioned to “Phase 5”, thus allowing a much-anticipated return to normal daily life!

We are writing today to request your continued leadership as we plan for a full reopening of our schools this fall. We look forward to providing in-person instruction and support for our students as we resume our “normal” schedules and routines. The resolution adopted by ISBE in May delivered a clear message to us that our State’s leaders share this vision for 2021-2022. However, there are numerous unresolved issues that must be promptly addressed before we can effectively implement our 2021-2022 school year planning. Listed below are the issues on which we are seeking more clarity.

Social Distancing Guidance

Social distancing guidance evolved in recent months from a six feet to a three feet expectation for instructional purposes. This was helpful in allowing more students to safely return more frequently to our school buildings while most schools operated a blended learning model. However, in order to allow ALL students back into our schools for a FULL day of instruction, social distance guidance for instructional purposes should be supported by the contact tracing protocol. As school districts are now planning to meet the current guidance for the 2021-22 school year, we need clear and consistent social distancing guidance regarding the following:

- the extent to which social distancing requirements will be lifted or altered so that ESSER and taxpayer dollars can be allocated properly for students and so that adequate space can be arranged for multiple settings and purposes (e.g., cafeterias, corridors, classrooms, etc.); and
- any distinctions regarding face covering and social distancing requirements made between adults and students, fully vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, regular school activities and extracurricular activities and events, school settings and non-school settings (e.g., district office and Board of Education meetings), indoor and outdoor environments, for schools that implement a rapid COVID testing program and those that do not, and for non-school groups that utilize school facilities.

We look forward to receiving your guidance on these matters and hope that this guidance does not hinder our ability to fully reopen our schools.

Quarantine Guidance

The guidance on mandatory quarantine related to COVID has also evolved over the past year. We hope that this policy will continue to evolve as more individuals are vaccinated. We look forward to receiving guidance that addresses the following issues:

- a clear definition of “close contact” in the school setting and consistency with physical distancing recommendations;
- updated “contact tracing” expectations of school; and
- differentiated quarantine requirements for vaccinated vs. unvaccinated individuals.

Masking Guidance

We are seeking clear guidance regarding masking expectations that are appropriate for schools and are also consistent with other settings. Currently, participants in summer school classes in our buildings are required to wear face coverings. However, participants in athletic practices in the gym down the hall are required to wear face coverings if they are not vaccinated. This is challenging to say the least. Fully vaccinated individuals are no longer required to wear masks in most environments throughout the state. Unvaccinated individuals are “encouraged” (but not mandated) to wear masks in public settings. If there is a compelling reason why these individuals must wear masks in schools, we hope that a clear explanation and rationale can be provided to justify this inconsistency. Additionally, there is concern that districts would only be allowed to relax the mask mandate if a testing program is in place. For schools with students that are all vaccine eligible, we hope that schools are not forced to implement testing programs that, while funded by the ISBE, will put staffing and operational strain on districts.

Vaccination Records Guidance

Much of the recent guidance provided by IDPH differentiates expectations for individuals who are fully vaccinated as compared to unvaccinated individuals. It is assumed that future guidance will continue to include this differentiation. Therefore, it may be necessary for schools to possess valid information regarding the vaccination status of students, staff, and others to comply with these expectations. We are hoping that future guidance will address these issues and the questions below:

- Will schools be provided access to vaccination information on individuals from the IDPH or other state agencies?
- Will schools be expected (or allowed) to collect and maintain vaccination data from employees, students, or others?
- Will staff members and students be compelled to share vaccination data with schools?
- Can schools require vaccinations (or COVID testing) of staff members or students who seek to participate in extracurricular programs, or any other situations?

Again, thank you for your dedicated work on behalf of all Illinoisans. We understand that the school system is just one important constituent that you need to work with as we come out of this terrible pandemic. However, most schools will be opening our doors and returning students and staff to campus for the start of the 2021-2022 school year in less than 60 days. Therefore, it is imperative that we are provided with the clear, consistent, and logical guidance necessary to effectively plan for a successful and comprehensive reopening of our schools. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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